

Working Together

Strengthening Families, Neighborhoods & Communities

By Secretary Dennis Braddock

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I am proposing that we change DSHS's relationship with families, neighborhoods and all our other community partners.

DSHS is often seen as a huge, hovering presence over the human services systems of local communities.

It's the "mother ship" model – a centralized command and control model with a mission to single-handedly save the world.

The truth is, we cannot single-handedly save the world, and the harder we try to do everything by ourselves, the less successful we will be.

So I would like all of us to disembark from the mother ship, and walk among the local inhabitants.

I would like us to see ourselves as smaller, and our clients and their communities as bigger.

I would like to see us develop a more humble view of our role – not just because humility is a virtue, but because it will help us achieve the goal of improving outcomes for children, families, clients, and communities.

The truth we have to keep coming back to is that our clients are not our clients alone. They do not define themselves in relation to us or to services they receive from us. In fact our "products" are considered by many as a sign of weakness and failure – not something persons want to be associated with or identified by.

Most importantly, they are members of families, students in schools, and residents in communities, and in most cases they are much more strongly connected to those institutions than they are to us.

Many also have other strong connections -- to faith communities, to tribes, to employers, to close friends, and to both formal and informal groups based on ethnicity, personal interest, or affinity.

We simply cannot serve our clients well when we isolate ourselves from this profoundly important web of support and we need to avoid practices and programs that further isolate our clients from these community and family support structures.

We cannot achieve the goal of integrating services unless we also align the services we provide with those beyond our offices.

We must recognize the power of family members, neighbors, and informal support networks for our clients.

In many, if not most cases, these innovations were initiated by field staff who were able to get the support they need from leadership.

These innovations have helped people get their lives back on track faster.

They have helped reduce the amount of time people spend in crisis, and reduce the amount, duration, and cost of the services they need.

These innovations have also led to a dispersal of power.

They have required that DSHS relinquish some control, and give greater weight and value to all the other support systems that clients rely on.

We need strategies that put more power and responsibility in the hands of clients, and improve people's lives.

This will cause discomfort but it is worth it for our clients, and worth it for us, because in the end, even though we may take more heat, we also produce better results.

Now we need to spread that discomfort, and that dispersal of control.

We need to do this to help our clients – and to help people not become our clients.

Stronger multilateral relationships

with families, neighborhoods, communities, non-profits, service providers and local governments can help us do this.

We can stimulate – as well as lead – greater effort and effectiveness in family, neighborhood and community-based prevention efforts.

We can help convene community conversations that bring people together to work out more effective relationships, and to identify opportunities to promote healthier lives.

We can also do that at the level of the individual client, so that we mobilize all the resources available to them.

And we can do this at every level, in every community, in every office of every program in DSHS.

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Examples of projects that combine the forces of DSHS and community partners are not hard to find:

- The Greater Pierce County Community Network has pulled together the resources of the entire community to care for kids coming out of meth homes.
- The Spokane CSOs, Employment Security and the Community Colleges have melded their efforts into a partnership to facilitate WorkFirst participants re-entry into the work force.
- The Whatcom County Community Network has developed a wraparound model that mobilizes family, community, and government resources for troubled kids.
- In Seattle, an ESA worker is now placed in the Municipal Court building, as part of a local initiative to reduce the number of people in jail by connecting them to the services they need to comply with court orders.
- In Yakima, the Children's Administration and the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration partner in a NWD project to successfully reunite youth being released from the JRA institution with their families.